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AUTHOR Webb, Dwight
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to determine some of the effects of Basic Encounter Group Counseling on senior students in college who are training to become elementary school teachers. The hypothesis was that those receiving this counseling would be more competent and effective than the control group of students who received no such counseling. The results of the study found no significant differences in the evaluative criteria in directions which were hypothesized. Obstacles to possible improvement by the experimental group are listed, including: (1) participation in the experimental group was not voluntary; (2) no credit was given for the experience; (3) groups were too large. However, most participants felt the experiment was worthwhile and helped to enhance their self-confidence and relationships with others. (KJ)

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BASIC ENCOUNTER GROUP COUNSELING FOR ELEMENTARY TEACHERS IN TRAINING

by

Dwight Webb
Assistant Professor of Education
University of New Hampshire
Durham, New Hampshire 03824

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Basic Encounter Group Counseling for Elementary Teachers in Training

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to determine some of the effects of Basic Encounter Group Counseling on senior students in college who are training to become elementary school teachers.

Rationale

Educational institutions have traditionally neglected to consider that training in human relations should be an integral part of any curriculum. This neglect in recent years is in part due to the emphasis on achieving proficiency in more cognitive areas, particularly in mathematics and science. James B. Conant's (1960) survey of American high schools led him to suggest that these were the areas in which improvement was imperative if we were to meet the challenge of Sputnik. The nation's educational response to this is well documented. The shortcomings of this were not predicted, namely the consequent effects of technocracy, the synthetic mechanical extensions of man which have lead some observers to suggest, indeed indict our society that such a prevailing impersonality may leave man in a meaning vacuum. Eric Fromm (1941) saw this happening to the nation much earlier and wrote: "The concrete relationship of one individual to another has lost its direct and human character and has assumed a spirit of manipulation and instrumentality." Partial evidence of the consequences may be seen daily in newspaper and magazine articles across the country which deal with violence on the streets and on campus, teacher strikes, and the like.

The demands for relevance, for involvement for power in decisions which effect the lives of young people are being heard loudly in the colleges and now in the high schools and even junior high schools across the country. All of these demands are seen as a quest for meaning and personal identity. They are a rejection of traditional values of the importance of fact oriented disciplines and material gains. In an age of information explosion and immediacy of communication, the teacher's role must move toward that of facilitator and away from predominately information giver. To facilitate the learning of others means to attend to affective dimensions and to individual differences. Teacher education must change to meet new challenges.

Many studies, including Anderson and Brewer (1946), Dugan (1961), Amidon and Flanders (1961), Leeds (1962), Solomon (1964), and Webb (1967) have demonstrated, as one might suspect, that children respond differently while under the training of different types of adults. Getzels and Jackson (1963) argue that the personality of the teachers is perhaps the most significant variable in the classroom. Leeds' study (1962) supports a seemingly obvious extreme of this situation when he states that:

> Maladjusted teachers whose personality patterns are not conducive to pleasant and harmonious relations with children are actually detrimental to the optimum personal growth of their pupils. Inability to establish rapport with children leads to ineffective learning situations, disciplinary problems and undesirable attitudes of both teachers and pupils. (p. 12)

Hart (1934), Witty (1947), Cogan (1958), Heil, Powell and Feifer (1960), Ryans (1960a and b), and Flanders (1960) and Combs (1965) have identified the characteristics of a "good" teacher. These works generally concur with their findings that a good teacher is at ease with himself and others, has a sense of humor, is open and honest, is able to communicate, and is flexible. He does not have a need for authority and power, nor is he troubled with a variety of anxieties. Essentially, the goal of human relations training through basic encounter group counseling is to help an individual achieve these characteristics.

Bowers and Soar (1960) conducted one of the few evaluative studies of laboratory training in human relations with 60 elementary school teachers, 25 of whom participated in the two experimental groups of 12 and 13 which met for a three week workshop patterned after those of the National Training Laboratories. They reported that teachers who experienced training in human relations found their work as teachers was somewhat easier, more relaxing and more satisfying than had been the case prior to the experience. One of the authors' recommendations was that this experience be introduced to teachers in training.

Harris and Dingle (1967) later supported by Weir (1968) in their findings conducted two sensitivity training experiments in which graduate students in the fields of education, guidance and counseling, social work, and the religious ministry participated in weekly two-hour sessions for 13-15 weeks. The students reported that they were helped especially in the area of learning about themselves and their relationships with others.

Paul Goodman (1968) states the case in the following way: "Any benevolent grown up--literate or illiterate--has plenty to teach an eight-year-old; the only profitable training for teachers is a group therapy and, perhaps, a course in child development." (p. 73)

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that those senior students in the elementary education program at the University of New Hampshire who receive Basic Encounter Group Counseling for one and one half hours per week for thirty weeks, will be rated as more competent and effective teachers* than will be a comparable control group of senior students who do not receive Basic Encounter Group Counseling in their senior year of training.

*as indicated by the evaluative criteria

Design

One half of the 80 students enrolled in the Elementary Education Program at the University of New Hampshire were randomly selected to receive encounter group counseling for 1½ hours each week of the academic year. Members of the treatment group were randomly divided into four subgroups of 10 or 11 each and the Project Director served as the leader of one group while three graduate students in counselor education served as group leaders for the remainder.

All group leaders had experienced an encounter group process the previous academic year. This writer served as the leader for a group of Master's degree candidates which involved these three group leaders. This experience gave a common base for style of leadership as well as for goals and objectives. The evolving process was expected to follow a pattern related to what Rogers (1966) described in an article entitled The Process of the Basic Encounter Group.

Evaluative Criteria

Instruments both established and tailor-made were used for this study. The primary focus was on the prospective teacher as a sensitive individual, one who was at peace within and effective in interpersonal relationships.

Following are listed the instruments used in attempting to measure change by objective methods.

Instruments Used Pre and Post Treatment

1. The Minnesota Teachers Attitude Inventory
2. The Mooney Problems Checklist (College Form)
3. The Opinionnaire (The Dogmatism Scale by Rokeach)
4. The Student Teacher Self Report
5. Myself as Teacher

Instruments Used Post Treatment

6. The University of New Hampshire Elementary School Student Teaching Evaluation Form
7. College Supervisors Evaluation Form

Method for Data Analysis

All pre test data was recorded for the experimental and control groups and matching of scores was done on each criterion instrument. The control group served as a pool for matching in each instrument. No control student served more than once on any one instrument. The post test data was likewise recorded and all control members served as the same match as on their pre test measure in order to serve as a substantive comparative base.

For the post test measures, matching was not an appropriate procedure. For all seven instruments the statistical method used was a "t" test analysis of differences between the means of the experimental and control groups. For instruments one through five this analysis was for the means of the differences between the pre and post test performances. For example: If experimental student 1 registered a pre test of 20 and a post test of 30 the difference of 10 was recorded. The differences then were summed for all experimental and control students and means and standard deviations of these differences were derived. For the post treatment instruments (6-7) the "t" test analysis was applied to the differences between means on the post treatment performance.

Findings

The results of the study found no significant differences in the evaluative criteria in directions which were hypothesized. The trend was for both experimental and control groups to increase in sensitivity and show gains in the criteria which suggest they were more effective and competent at the end of the year than they were in September. In some cases the control group showed more gain than the experimental group, and in one case this difference was significant at the .01 level of confidence. This difference was on the Mooney Problems Checklist where post treatment scores for the control group indicated that they reported fewer problems than the experimental group. While this difference is not immediately explainable, one hypothesis forwarded by the principal investigator is that this anomaly was due to the fact that the treatment group became more open and honest, thus more free to risk being real and admitting problems which existed as opposed to the more guarded response, denying these difficulties in order to appear more favorable. This conjecture seems reasonable since openness, honesty with self were goals of the encounter group and since the instruments for measuring change are highly visable and fakable.

Problems Encountered

Other plausible reasons for the attenuated performance of the experimental group were the several factors which were seen as obstacles to the fulfillment of the goals and objectives of the treatment. They were:

1. By far and away the single largest obstacle or dimension of resistance was the fact that participation in encounter groups was not voluntary.* While this factor was to some extent predictable, the nature of the research design (which attempted to measure the experience of encounter group from a non-biased sample) built in its own worst stumbling block.

2. Credit was not given for this experience.

*Because of this obstacle, it was made voluntary in December after about eight meetings. The number of regular participants dropped from 44 to 35.

3. All elementary education students were on a very heavy classroom schedule and this encounter activity was simply an overload to an already overburdened program. Every attempt was made to gain release time from another required course, but this was not possible.

4. The above problems caused erratic attendance for some and this created a lack of cohesion and continuity, as well as interrupting the trust factor.

5. There was a marked discrepancy in leadership ability among the group leaders.

6. In response to the leadership problems which emerged, the supervision on the part of this writer should have been stronger.

7. The groups were too large in the beginning.

8. Although the University provided rooms for group meetings, these facilities for space were less than ideal.

9. One and one half hours each week is not enough time for intense interaction.

10. The problem of instruments or criteria by which to measure change cannot be dismissed lightly as a cause for failing to find differences. One must remember that failing to find differences does not mean automatically that differences do not exist.

Fred Massarik (1965), who has designed probably one of the more comprehensive sensitivity training impact models (STIM), has written perhaps the most fitting remarks regarding the criteria problem:

> Indeed, any kind of human relations training, whatever its orientation or name, is but another, rather brief slice of life. Its blood and marrow necessarily is that of social and personal life itself, the transaction of human relationships, and the consequent derivation of conscious and unconscious meaning within heart and mind of the individual. When seeking to assess the impact of sensitivity training we may aspire to the utmost in precision and scientific care. But, as the tangles of causality in life as a whole still remain labyrinthine, so measurement of sensitivity training impact no doubt will continue for some time to come to blend the injunctions of exactness with the pleasant necessity of intuition. (p. 45)

11. Coupled with problems of instruments which may have been too general to pick up specific change or too specific to pick up general change, is the very observable trend that both groups changed to a moderate extent in a positive direction. This suggests that the control group was being impacted by input on sensitivity, self-understanding, effective communications, etc., from the regular on-going program while the treatment group was getting this plus the additional encounter group experience. This research design problem would be difficult to rule out from an ethical viewpoint. That is to say, while controlling the variable of affective input to some extent, it would seem unwise to create a sterile affective input environment for the control group although from a "design-pure" point of view this might be desirable.

It seems important to this writer to report these observations learned in retrospect so that future programs may avoid the trappings which most certainly attenuated the results.

Discussion of More Positive Findings

The most dramatic data for presenting the positive aspects of the experiment are seen in the findings of the evaluation form given to the members of experimental groups (See Table I).

The fact that 29 people out of 30 reporting credited the group experience as helpful indicates to this writer that the experiment was worthwhile. An effort was made to evaluate the encounter group activity by asking experimental members to rate this experience as compared to other program required activities of similar time commitment. This evaluation was not allowed as the directors of the program felt that such an exposure might cause ill-feelings or misunderstanding on the part of the faculty responsible for sections which might have been rated low. This investigator and Project Director was hypothesizing that the encounter experience would not be the least valued among many inputs.

There was a growing sense of cohesion and commitment among the remaining members as they attended voluntarily. In addition, the fact that this encounter group experience provided a group of concerned, caring, interested, non-threatening people committed to trying to help and understand made this weekly sojourn a place to be real, to discuss fears and anxieties and to share, explore and discover that you are not alone. Such feelings and anxieties as remaining unmarried, fears of graduating and going out on your own, uncertainty about being a good teacher, anger and frustration at student teaching experience, were representative of the kinds of personal explorations for meaning which transpired in all the groups. This outlet, release, opportunity to explore and share together should not be regarded lightly even though instruments cannot measure or register the fact that for one person, help might be discovery that others are also feeling insecure about graduating, or becoming a teacher while another person gains from the insight that her perceptions of self as inadequate and unsure are not shared by others.

TABLE I

EXPERIMENTAL PARTICIPANTS
EVALUATION OF BASIC ENCOUNTER GROUP EXPERIENCE

	Student	Self Confidence	Relationships with others	Self Understanding	More Open	More Accepting	More Honest	Total Score
Group I	1	3	0	3	0	6	0	12
	2	6	6	6	6	6	6	36
	3	6	6	6	6	0	3	27
	4	3	3	6	3	6	3	24
	5	3	6	6	6	3	6	30
	6	3	6	6	6	3	3	27
	7	3	3	3	6	3	3	21
	8	3	3	3	6	6	6	24
	9	3	6	3	3	3	3	21
	10	6	3	6	6	6	3	30
							Mean	25.20
Group II	11	3	0	3	3	3	0	12
	12	3	3	3	0	3	0	12
	13	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
	14	0	0	3	3	3	3	12
	15	3	3	0	0	3	0	9
	16	0	3	3	3	3	3	15
	17	3	3	3	0	3	0	12
	18	3	3	3	0	6	3	18
	19	3	3	3	6	3	3	21
							Mean	14.33
Group III	20	0	0	3	0	0	0	3
	21	0	3	0	0	3	0	6
	22	3	3	3	3	3	3	18
	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	24	3	0	3	0	0	0	6
							Mean	6.67
Group IV	25	3	6	3	3	3	3	21
	26	3	3	6	3	3	6	24
	27	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
	28	3	0	3	3	0	3	12
	29	3	6	3	3	3	3	21
	30	3	3	3	6	3	6	24
							Mean	17.50
No. of Students Reporting Group as Beneficial		24	22	26	20	25	20	17.30 Total Mean

Key: 0 = No help 3 = Some help 6 = A lot of help

This writer is encouraged by the report given by the students participating.

Out of 30 students reporting, 24 students indicated that the group was helpful in enhancing their self-confidence, 22 reported that their relationships with others had been helped, 26 felt that they saw themselves as more open as a result of the group, 25 felt more accepting toward others and 20 indicated that they were now more honest in their relationships to others.

These direct sources of feedback (as opposed to more indirect or subtle probes with more formal instruments) indicate rather clearly that for the majority the encounter group experience was very positive. Such dimensions as self-confidence and self-understanding may not be so readily measured or observed by others.

Some of the comments by participating members reveal how they valued this experience. For example:

> "I feel this to have been a very good experience, simply the experience of <u>really</u> communicating with others and of trying to become familiar with my own feelings. I think I am more aware now of how I feel about myself, ..."
>
> "I have learned to listen to other people and really attempt to understand what the hell they are talking about--and to care. Also I have found it easier to realize what I am feeling and express it. I also feel a great respect from this group and this has done a great deal for my own self-image. They seem to like me for me and this does mean so much to me. I have also learned to respect others for what they are and accept them."
>
> "This should be required for anyone who wants to be an elementary teacher of children."
>
> "I feel so glad I was a part of it."
>
> "...it would be beneficial to every prospective teacher."
>
> "I learned about the people in the group and some about myself. To be happy with the 'self' it is a constant evaluation and working at type of process and I hope that I made a good start at that process."

<u>Recommendations</u>

On the basis of the findings from this study, this writer would have to assert only modest claims of success which would support a recommendation of implementation.

Specific recommendations are as follows:

1. Encounter group counseling should be given as a bonafide, credited component of the curriculum for teacher preparation. Without credit, the individual commitment to this endeavor is of low priority, particularly in busy schedules. It is particularly important to give credit if students are required to take it.

2. Ideally basic encounter group counseling should be elective. As an elective it should still be given course credit and recognition as an acceptable alternate for another course, for example, Educational Psychology or Educational Sociology.

3. Group leaders must be well trained and selected carefully. Ideally, leadership training courses such as those held at the National Training Laboratory in Bethel, Maine, should be prerequisite.

4. Marathon exercises should be implemented to break away from traditional scheduling modes. This would be facilitated if (a) the groups are meeting for credit and/or (b) the groups are meeting voluntarily.

5. The size of the group should not exceed 10 and preferably should be 7, 8 or 9.

6. There should be adequate rooms for meeting to provide an environment conducive to relaxation, intimate interaction and personal exploration. These rooms should be relatively free from distracting stimuli and stiff or formal seating arrangements.

7. Two hours a week should be the minimum time commitment to encounter group counseling. Three or four hours would be better and not an unfeasible goal.

8. More tailor made instruments should be constructed to sample the depth of experience and the variety of avenues which attitudinal change might take. Testimonial data must be given close evaluation and not treated lightly because it may not seem as "pure" or "scientifically clean" as more standard and conventional instruments.

9. Encounter group sessions as a component to a total program should be evaluated in that total context. This activity should be compared to other curricular inputs and teacher training institutions might then continually modify their total programs or components within it.

10. Encounter group counseling should be integrated into existing teacher training programs when trained personnel (including graduate students) are available for leadership and when conditions of time, space, and group size are also satisfactory. Encounter group counseling as an "additive" or "extra" will not be as effective in terms of total program goals.

11. Incorporate human relations training into the education curriculum as a two semester course in group dynamics. This course should be considered for juniors, at the time one must make a decision regarding the senior year commitment to a full education curriculum.

The students who participated in the encounter group sessions were asked, "Would you recommend that this experience be included as a part of the regular elementary education program?" The responses were as follows:

Yes (unconditionally)	Yes (if voluntary)	No
19	12	4

This writer is encouraged that 31 out of 35 would choose this activity and recommend it for those entering the program. I would hypothesize that this degree of acceptance would compare favorably to any of the inputs currently established and integrated into the curriculum.

Conclusions

The conclusions may then be summarized as follows:

That while the hypotheses were not born out from the hard data of the evaluative criteria, and while there were many factors operating which caused impairment in process and attenuated results, the impressions from the majority of participants themselves are favorable. On this basis the activity is clearly seen as deserving of implementation when the conditions outlined in the specific recommendations can be met.

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